

[James W. Mathis]

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FOLKSTUFF - RANGE LORE [47?]

Gauthier, Sheldon F.

Rangelore,

Tarrant Co., Dist., #7,

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James W. Mathis, 65, was born Feb. 1, 1873 at Logan Co., Ark. His father migrated from Ark, [??] Co., Texas, in the year of 1885. He settled on a tract of land located [60?] miles N. of Austin, adjacent to the Colorado River. The tract of land belonged to John [Sherly?], grandfather of James, who conducted a cattle ranch.

William Mathis and John Sherly became partners in the operation of the Sherly cattle ranch. James Mathis then 12 years old, immediately went to work as a cowboy, which work he followed until 1898. He then quit the range to engage in farming and moved to Tarrant Co., Texas, settling on a tract of land located at Diamond Hill, now a part of the city of Fort Worth.

His story of range life follows:

"I was born in the State of Ark, Feb. 1, 1173. My father was a farmer and he cultivated land located in Logan Co. Father sold his Logan Co, farm in 1885, and started for Burnet Co, Texas, with his family and household goods loaded in a covered wagon. The outfit

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was pulled by a team of oxen, so we had plenty of time to view the country as we passed through it.

“When we arrived at the Washita River in the Indian Territory (now Okla.) my brother became very sick and the boy's condition caused my father to change his plans. Father decided to travel the remainder of the way by train and he sold his oxen and wagon to a party at the river crossing. The sale deal called for the buyer to deliver the family and our personal goods to Clarksville, Texas, which was done and there we boarded a train for Austin.

“The ride from Clarksville to Austin was enjoyed by all of us, more than usual, because of our wagon and ox team trip. C12 - 2/11/41 - Texas 2 When we arrived at Austin [??] to another railroad for our trip to [Burnet?]. Well, that was a train ride which [will?] stick in my mind so [longaas?] I live.

“The distance from Austin is around 60 miles and it took that train [seven?] hours to make the run. Yes, sir, it was seven o'clock in the morning when got aboard that [narrow-gage?] railroad train, and we lit in Burnet at two o'clock in the evening. There was no rock, washout, or [broken?] track. the only interference that the train encountered was an occasional bunch of cattle [or?] sheep which were on the track and had to be chased off. Outside of stopping so the train crew could chase the critters off of the track, that train proceded steadily, except to [taken on?] fuel, [Discharge?] passengers and such other routine work as is usually done.

“Along about at half way father began to worry about our fare. there were four of us children all entitled to half fare because of our ages. While discussing the speed of the train with mother, father said to her, 'I wouldn't be surprised if we are called upon to pay full fare for these children, because they all will be over 12 years old by the time we arrive at Burnet. The conductor questioned my age when he took up the tickets, and I was a triffle large for my age, but father told the conductor that '[??] may be over the half fare limit

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now, [??] fault of mine, the child was under the limit when we got on the train. 3 “There was [one?] [?] feature about the train and that was its racing. Two of the children were under three years old and the two young lads slept nearly all of the way, because they reckoned that they were in a cradle. However, mother didn't fair so well, she became sea-sick and claimed that the rocking caused it, but father maintained it was due to mother being reared in Arkansas, where folks never rode in anything but wagons pulled by oxen. Therefore, she was only overly excited from the train's speed.

“We had been traveling for about an hour or so when the train stopped and we were in the open country with not a house in sight. After the train was again on its way, and the conductor came through the coach, father inquired of him why the train stopped. The conductor said, 'a bunch of critters were on the track and the fireman had to chase those animals off to prevent running into the lot'. In about 30 minutes after the train started it stopped again and when the conductor came through father again asked him about the cause of the stop. The conductor said:

“It's the same trouble, cattle on the track again”.

“Impossible! replied my father. 'This train couldn't have caught up with those critters so quick”.

“Every hour, while running that 60 miles, the train stopped once or twice while the train crew chased critters off of the track. Looking out of the train's windows, all that one could see was herds of critters.

“We were headed for the cattle ranch belonging to my 4 mother's father, John Sherly. Father went there to jion him in the cattle business.

“Mother said to father, while on the train and looking at the herds of cattle through the window: "we can be sure of one item of food and that is milk. “When we arrived at grandfather's place mother couldn't find one drop of milk or a speck of butter anywhere

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about the ranch nor a cow that was being milked. Mother couldn't understand how folks would go without milk and butter while surrounded with thousands of cows. She asked grandfather about the milk matter he told her that it was disrespectful for a cowhand to milk a cow and none of his men would lower their dignity to such extent. However, it was considered fitting for a woman to do milking and that she could do all the milking that she wished to. Father cut out a couple young mother cows and we had plenty of milk, cream and butter in a short spell of time. It took a week before father could gentle the animals to stand for being milked.

"The Sherly ranch was located in the section of Burnet Co. touching the Colorado River. The North end of the ranch was where the Colorado River Dam is now builded. There were around [200?] head grazing on an open range that later was fenced.

The Sherly ranch [heradquarters?] had a small tract of land adjacent to it that was cultivated and fenced against the cattle. On the tract of land vegetables, wheat and corn was raised for family use. The meat supply was at hand on all sides and a fat yearling was butchered when a supply of beef was needed. In additon to beef, we had an abundance of wild game that could 5 be hunted [ezaily?] and we had wild game meat when we hankered for it.

I was old enough to work when we settled in Burnet Co, consequently, I started at once to learn the cowhand's jobs. First, I had to learn how to ride a hoss and that did not take long. Inside of a month I was pert enough at riding to handle an ordinary hoss. I learned to handle a rope while getting my riding knowledge and at the end of a month's time I took my part as a hand on the range.

"Except during the roundup, we lived at the ranch house. We waddies would be in the headquarters every night, but our work took us during the day for quite a piece, at times, and then the boys would carry snack for our noon lunch. We rode over the range keeping our eye peeled for bogged and injured critters. When we came upon a bogged animal,

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we would put the loop on the critter and the hoss did the rest, by pulling with the rope tied to the saddle horn. Screw worms were another thing we had to watch for. Worm would often get into cuts that the critters received and we had a salve concoction that us waddies applied to the cut which killed the worms.

“When a bunch of critters were wanted for the market we would cut those out and hold that herd until [delievered?], and with such herds was the only night riding we did. What I have [chined?] about the work was the regular routine the year round, except the spring roundup.

“During the spring roundup all the outfits ranging in that section would unite their crews and work the range together. 6 The crews worked as one outfit and the reason for so working was due to critters belonging to the different ranches being mixed, more or less. [Someone?] of the waddies would be put in charge of the roundup and the waddies would be divided into several crews for the various jobs. Some did the gathering of the cattle, some did the herding after the critters were gathered, some did the cutting out, and some attended to the [branding?]. Of course, in addition was the cooks and the hoss wranglers.

“The crew which did the gathering took a section of the range at a time and hunted out all the critters, drove the those to a central point during the day and then at the end of of the day's work drove the herd into the branding camp. At the camp the herd was turned over to riders that rode the line holding the critters until the herd was cut and branded, after which the animals were turned loose to run the range again.

“The cutting crew had mostly calves to deal with, but occasionally a maverick would be found. The cutters were mounted on the top hosses that were in the [remuda?] and would change mounts about each hour. The cutters would ride into the herd looking for unbranded critters and those found would be cut out, roped, hogtied and then branded with the critter's proper brand. The mother cow always gave the cue to the brandmen as to what brand to burn on the calf. When a cutter [looped?] a calf it would start [bawling?]

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and its mother then would come a-running to it. What ever kind of a brand the mother carried would be the brand burnt on the calf. It always has been a wonder to me how a mother cow could tell the bawl of its calf out of the hundreds 7 that would be in a herd. When it came to branding mavericks, those were rotated, sort of divided among the outfits, because there was no way of telling which ranch owned the [marvericks?].

“Among the outfits that took part in the roundups with John Sherly were Jim Beaman, John Croft and several small outfits that came and went so gave a different lineup each year. Sherly and Beaman united their chuck wagon outfits and did the cooking for the whole outfit at the roundups.

“It took between 30 and 60 days to cover the whole range section and during that spell we did our sleeping rolled up in a blanket and if it rained we threw a slicker over the blanket.

“When the weather was pretty we all spent enjoyable hours around the camp fire before doing our blanket roll. Of course there was night riding to do, but only four to six men did riding at a time and riding crews were changed every four hours. Night riding was necessary at the roundups, because the herd had to be held until the cutting and branding was done.

“Outside of the waddies riding the line, all of the waddies could engage in some kind of pass-time, before [rilling?] in for the night's shut-eye. Some of the waddies would play poker, some would tell stories and some would be sitting around a fiddler listening to [catgut?] agitation, and perhaps to sing to the fiddlers accompaiment.

“My father was an agitator of the [catgut?] and he always had an audience. I have forgotten nearly all the words of the songs them waddies sang. I'll try and give the words of one song that was often sang. 8 “As I was a walking one morning for pleasure, I spied a cowbuncher riding along. His hat was thrown back and his spurs was a-jinglin'. as he approached he was singing this song. [Whoopee, ty yi yo?] get along little dogie. Sing 'er out my bold coyotes, lether fists and leather throats. Tell the stars the way we rubbed the

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haughty dawn. We'er the fiercest wolves a howling and it's just our night for prowling. [??]
a-riding up the rocky trail from town”

“What interested me was the story telling. Now, when them waddies were all bunched together and started to telling about their experiences, cattle were herded from the Rio Grande to the Canadian boarder, stampedes were handled in hurricanes, ferocious beast were roped and hogtied single handed and wild stalions, of extreme beauty, were busted and genteled to household pets.

“If a fellow wanted to become educated in the cow business, all that was necessary for him to do was to sit and listen to them old rawhides rattle off hot air.

I shall repeat a story that I still can recall that was told, which will give one an idea of the stories of experiences which were told at the camp. The story was told by an old waddie who had [worked?] in all section of the cattle country, and here it is:

“One spell I spent a couple of weeks in Amarillo, after working the roundup for the 'T Diamond' outfit. It was back in the days when Amarillo's business places were mostly pizen jionts, gambling joits and [?]-pens.

'There was one pizen joint that run a louse nest in connection with its bar and the place bunked you in those nest 9 for a two-[?] piece, but guaranted nothing and a buckaroo just took his chances on what ever would happen. I patronized this louse-nest for my spells of shut-eye and drank most of my pizen at its bar.

“At the end of the second week, one night, I rolled into the nest for a spell of rest. I awoke after being asleep for some time and heard the knob of my door moving. I squinted at the door and saw it slowly opening. It opend fully and then I saw standing on the threshold a human dressed in the garb of a woman. However, by its looks I couldn't tell for sure that it was a human. The hags face had no nose, her face was simular in shape to those of a

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rat's and I couldn't see a mouth, where the mouth ought to be at, and her eyes glistened like two pieces of glass.

“Not a sound did the hag utter, she just stood gazing at me. It had me plum loco, but I finally yelled, 'get to hell out of here, and do it pronto”.

“The door then began to slowly move to and closed without any noise.

“Now, you waddies know that a short visit by such a person is too long and more visits than one is too many, so I got out of bed and bolted the door and calculated that I had forgotten to attend to that chore when I rolled into the nest.

“I had a bottle of stimulating pizen and quaffed a shot of it to settle me nevers, then crawled into the nest for some shut-eye.

“That shot of pizen got to doing its duty and I was feeling quite pert, when again I heard the knob of the door moving and the door slowly opened. By God! there stood the caller 10 staring at me again. That put me plum riled and I threw down on the hag and shot three times. Now, you fellows may not believe this, but the shots never fizzed the hag. I then saw that shooting couldn't get me anywhere as I was in a gopher hole. However, the door slowly closed again after the shooting and that settled the matter for the time being.

“It came into my conk to go down to the bar, then the idea of meeting the hag in the dark put leaving the room out of my head. I hit the pizen again to settle my nerves. It was a chilly night, but drops of sweat were standing all over me. I tried to figure my proper move, but couldn't see any way out except to wait for daylight, so there I sit with the bottle of pizen for company and consolation.

“I received two more calls and each were a repetition of the others. At the first break of day I left the room for the bar. The prop' was there and I told him what kind of a place I calculated he was running. The prop' sez to me, he sez, 'fellow the place is in top shape.

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Now, here is the layout. A pizen salesman dropped in here a short spell back and sold me a barrel of pizen, guaranting it to be of good taste and flavor. The price was half that which I usually pay so I took a chance on the stuff. There is only one way I can test liquor and that is by having some one drink it. I used you for the test and I reckon the pizen is alright, because it took two week for it to put you loco."

"The cattle rustlers caused additional work for the waddies. There was a spell of time when rustling was real troublesome in 11 Burnet, Co, and adjoining territory. It was said that if Jim Beaman, "Uncle" Alex Coft and John Sherly were taken out of the county there would be nobody but rustlers left. In fact, Beaman was put out of the cattle business at one time by rustlers. He became a wee bit careless about watching his herd and the rustlers took nearly all of his stock.

"There was many fights between the rustlers and [?], and many men were hung up to dry [?] branded for the eternal range. There was an organization formed by the [?] element that was called the vigilants and when a party was known to be a rustler, a notice to leave the country would be delievered to the such person. If the pary ignored the notice then the vigilants would make a call. [???], Dave [?] had a brother who received a notice from the vigilants to which he paid no mind. The day after the time set for him to leave, as set up in the notice, his hoss came home without its rider and the saddle was covered with blood. A short time after this incident Dave received a notice demanding that he leave the country in three days. [?] read the notice [?] said; 'The varments 'llows me three days to drag out o'here, but I'll give 'em back two and half days[?] and he did by getting out pronto.

"The Texas Rangers came into the section and did a clean up job, after that things became more orderly.

"The Indian trouble was about over with when we lit in the country. There was only one raid which took place after we arrived there. A family living at the Pack Saddle Mountain district were wipped out. The family's name was Whitlock or Woodlock, I can't recall which

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of the two names is correct. 12 "If we leave out the rustler trouble, all the tough times in the cattle business [tak?] took place before my family moved to Burnet Co. The work became easier after we came to the country. About the second yeat year after our arrival fences began to appear. John Sherly was among the first to fence the cattle range with wire and after the range was fenced the work was a great deal easier. We did not have to worry about the cattle drifting off. When a bad norther was on its way, and after it hit, the herd would drift for shelter. If the herd was not watched it would drift for miles during a bad spell of weather. The fence took care of the drifting trouble, however, riders had to be riding the [?] line at all times, watching for breaks, some of which were caused by the rustlers cutting the wire. The rustlers would cut a gap so the cattle could drift through and then the rustlers would pick the critters up.

"After Sherly completed his range fence, We had only one run in with the rustlers during my stay there. the The rustlers were spied picking up about [25?] head that had drifted through a gap in the fence, which they had cut. My father, Sherly, my brother Frank and I took out after the three fellows. They sighted us comming when we were about a mile away and then the rustlers poured their guthooks into their mounts. We dashed after fellows and it was as pretty a hoss race one would want to look at for about five miles. The rustlers were mounted on good hosses, which were equal to ours, and we had a pert time trying to keep in sight of the boys. It was late in the evening and the rustlers hit for the Colorado River bottom. With darkness 13 coming on, it was useless for us to try catching them, so we turned back, but we got our cattle back.

"I left Burnet Co. in [1898?] and came to Tarrant Co. I settled at Diamond Hill, that is now a part of the city of Fort [Worth?], and I farmed a tract of land there. There was not much farming around Fort Worth at that time. Just here and there a farm settler could be found. Most of the territory around the town was a cattle range. The territory [?] at Diamond Hill and extending N. to [Sagnaw?] was then the Daggett ranch.

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“My last work as a cowhand was dragging to Parker Co. with a small crew, and driving a herd of cattle to Frank's ranch which was located East of Fort Worth. That was in 1899, and from then on I devoted my life to farming.